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# CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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*Your future is Central.*

## **ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN** **August, 2003**

### ***PART I: Strategies Implemented in 2001-2003***

The behavior measured by accountability indicators is affected by some factors the university can influence, by other factors beyond its influence, and by seemingly random fluctuations. It is often difficult, therefore, for the university to assess the efficacy of its accountability initiatives. This is particularly true of the behavior measured by the common indicators. These are strongly affected by students' goals, decisions, and efforts, factors over which universities have limited control. Thus, while it is gratifying to see improvement in some accountability indicators, improvement we largely attribute to our initiatives, the lack of improvement in others is puzzling.

Central Washington University (CWU) focused much attention in the past biennium on issues of graduation and graduation efficiency. Freshmen orientation was reorganized to give the students a stronger start when they enter in the fall. All of those attending the orientations for new students participate in advising sessions at which advising staff and faculty representatives from each department are present. While attending the advising sessions, new students are given very specific, individualized guidance in their enrollment into fall classes. Also, new freshmen are now tested for placement into freshmen English and mathematics during orientation and are enrolled in the appropriate courses at that time. More than 90% of new freshmen entering this fall have already met with advisors and enrolled in fall classes. Mandatory fall freshmen advising classes are in place to keep them on track for a successful first year. The university also made progress in its ongoing efforts at expanding and enhancing transfer articulations, which have proven effective in preparing community college transfers to make more rapid progress once they enter CWU.

CWU continues to focus on retention. Students who were not maintaining a passing grade point average were targeted for academic counseling sessions. The Retention Action Team developed a retention plan and implemented new mentoring programs for these at-risk students. Retention programs were integrated into the long-term enrollment management plan devised by the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, thus giving retention programs a more prominent place in the work of this division.

CWU's five-year graduation rates have been rising, although year-to-year retention has not. One reason retention has been essentially flat the last three years, despite retention initiatives, is that with enrollment pressures growing, the university has been less forgiving with low performing students who fail to show significant improvement. In essence, students who are unlikely to eventually graduate are leaving the university earlier. However, with the entry of more academically talented freshmen classes and new retention programs in place, the university expects the trend of retention to improve and bolster the long-term improvement in graduation rates.

Graduation efficiency, as measured by the graduation efficiency index (GEI), is under review. Although this measure is conceptually simple, proper calculation is quite complex. Program credit requirements depend on a potentially vast number of permutations of majors, specializations, and minors. Moreover, CWU has historically lost over 20% of its freshmen class. Most students who leave the institution enroll in another, usually a community college, and many then return to CWU at a later date. The university has not used consistent practices in determining whether to count these "stop-outs" as freshmen or transfer students in calculating the GEI. This summer, the Office of Institutional Research has reviewed and revised program credit look-up tables used in calculating the GEI and is in the process of developing consistent rules for categorizing students as native freshmen and transfers. This will allow the establishment of a consistent baseline and consistency in future reporting of the GEI.

While CWU's freshmen are graduating at a higher rate, they may not be doing so more efficiently. Significant and sustained improvement in graduation efficiency may be difficult without constraining student choice in a manner unwelcome by both students and faculty. CWU currently has a decentralized system of faculty advising for students in majors. Faculty often encourage students to explore and experiment during their undergraduate years by selecting courses in a variety of fields. This approach fosters a true liberal arts education and allows students to select a final major with more assurance, but it does not always make for quick completion of degrees. Moreover, many students take some courses for personal interest that do not contribute to degree progress but that may make

them more productive citizens. Typical examples include additional course work in computer and information technology and courses in personal finance. The university is reluctant to restrict enrollment in such courses in order to shorten time to graduation. However, CWU has worked hard to improve the response to unmet student demand for courses. A sizeable pool of funds is now reserved for rapid deployment in the final weeks of registration. The provost, deans, and the registrar confer daily to open new sections in key courses as existing sections filled to capacity. In this way, the university is better able to offer a mix of courses that will facilitate progress toward degree completion.

Generally, the institution-specific accountability measures concern behavior that is more directly under the control of the university, as is certainly true of the learning outcomes indicator. As expected, CWU met the long-term goal of 100% program compliance for learning outcomes this last biennium. CWU has also steadily improved the rate at which transfer students declare majors their first year. Declared majors generally make better progress toward completing degrees. CWU's efforts in this arena have focused largely on broadening and strengthening its articulation agreements with community colleges, a task the university will continue in the coming biennium. The addition of a transfer coordinator in the admissions office improved the pre-registration advising of transfer students. The university also contacts transfer students during the fall and winter quarters of their first year to offer assistance and information concerning declaration of a major. CWU expects these efforts to eventually improve the efficiency of degree completion for transfer students. In the case of the indicator for faculty participation rates in formal mentoring programs, the trend has been flat. Revenue shortfalls have limited resources available for the formal mentoring programs, thus reducing some of the incentive for faculty and students to participate. Nevertheless, a committed core of faculty retain strong enthusiasm for these programs, and the university expects participation to rise unless resources for the programs become severely diminished.

The final three institution-specific measures are harder to directly affect than the previous measures because they are more dependent on students' decisions and efforts. Nevertheless, all show a steadily rising trend. Enrollment pressures drove up the student/faculty FTE ratio. The minority student graduation rate has improved along with overall graduation rates, and for many of the same reasons. In addition, the university regularly analyzes assessment results to identify any special problems minority students face on the path to graduation. Internship participation rates have been rising because our faculty and deans are constantly searching for internship opportunities for students. Schools and other employers have thus far responded enthusiastically, although national trends suggest further improvement in this indicator may be difficult to achieve in the next few years.

## ***PART 2: Proposed Targets and Measures for 2001-2003***

In the coming biennium, CWU will continue its current accountability initiatives and implement new ones as resources permit.

Retention, graduation, and graduation efficiency will continue to be the focus of considerable effort. New interventions are in progress for students who are not enrolling or making progress in the basic skills general education courses. Beginning this year, students will be required to complete the basic skills component of the general education curriculum by the time they reach seventy-five credit hours. The university is developing and implementing a program to target students with high credit totals for special advising, and will require them to develop a detailed plan for timely graduation. As it did during the last biennium, the university will continue to seek a better understanding of the impediments to more efficient degree completion and evaluate its advising processes with an eye toward striking an appropriate balance between encouraging exploration and completing degrees in a timely manner. The Retention Action Team has introduced as a new survey instrument intended to identify at-risk students before they begin classes, thus allowing student services to be directed where they are likely to be most effective. Also, the Retention Action Team will be devoting attention to the particular retention issues of minority students, in order to better address their unique needs. Finally, a program of long-term research on student development is being introduced that will give the university a better understanding of students' academic and personal development. This will allow retention initiatives to be better tailored to the specific problems facing our students. Although retention rates are often slow to improve, CWU expects its retention rates to begin a long-term rise in the coming biennium that will accelerate as new retention programs are applied to more academically talented entering classes. Better retention of students and new programs focused on accelerating their academic progress can be expected to improve graduation rates and graduation efficiency.

CWU will maintain its current initiatives for the institution-specific measures. The university will continue to monitor new programs for compliance with the requirement for explicit expected learning outcomes, and expects to keep the compliance rate at 100%. The university has been seeking external funds to expand innovative programs such as the Symposium on Undergraduate Research and Creative Expression, which it hopes will accelerate rates of participation in formal mentoring programs. As in the last biennium, enrollment pressures will drive the student/faculty FTE ratio up, perhaps to undesirable heights. (Research supports the view that personal contact with faculty is among the most important factors in retaining students. CWU therefore strives to prevent

excessively large class sizes.) Indeed, CWU expects to exceed its long-term goal on this measure in this biennium. The university also expects the rate of major declaration by transfer students to continue to rise as transfer articulations and transfer student advising continue to improve. Similarly, the continuation of efforts to improve graduation rates and efficiency, along with special retention efforts focused at the problems of minority students, should continue to drive up the minority graduation rate. However, the university does not expect participation in cooperative education to rise in the coming biennium. The national trend in a weakened economy is toward declining participation by employers in internship programs. Thus, CWU's goal regarding cooperative education is to maintain a constant or slowly rising student participation rate.

CWU proposes to retain the same set of measures for the coming biennium, with three qualifications. First, CWU is in the process of developing detailed and consistent rules for the GEI. Since this work is not yet completed, the university will propose goals for this measure in the form of increments from the revised baseline rate. Second, CWU proposes to limit the data for transfer declaration of majors to Washington community college transfers, who comprise the largest pool of transfer students to the university. Limiting the data in this way will produce a pool of transfers unaffected by year-to-year fluctuations in the proportions of transfers from two- and four-year universities. This more homogeneous pool will produce a more valid and reliable indicator since it will more nearly measure the same thing each year. Third, the university recognizes that the minority graduation rate, as it now stands (minority graduates/fall minority enrollment), is a questionable indicator because fluctuations in the denominator will cause the indicator to vary in ways not indicative of minority graduation. CWU is exploring alternative indicators. However, because minority cohorts are relatively small they tend to be statistically unstable. The university intends to replace its current indicator with a more valid one as soon as it finds a new indicator of sufficient stability. In the meantime, the university proposes a target of 25% on this indicator, which is the original long-term goal.

All of the baseline rates in this report are three-year moving averages, with the exception of the baseline for the percentage of programs with expected student learning outcomes.

**Table 1: Baseline Rates, Long-Term Goals, and Targets for the Next Biennium**

|   | <b>Three-Year<br/>Baseline</b> | <b>Long-Term<br/>Goal</b> | <b>2003-2004<br/>Target</b> | <b>2004-2005<br/>Target</b> |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>State Measures</b>   |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <b>Graduation Efficiency Index</b>  |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <i>a) Native Freshmen</i>   | N/A                            | 95.0%                     | baseline + .2%              | baseline + .4%              |
| <i>b) Transfer Students</i>   | N/A                            | 90.0%                     | baseline + .2%              | baseline + .4%              |
| <b>Retention</b>  |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <i>Degree-Seeking Undergraduates</i>  | 82.1%                          | 90.0%                     | 82.2%                       | 82.3%                       |
| <b>Fifth Year Graduation Rate</b>   |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <i>Native Freshmen</i>  | 45.1%                          | 55.0%                     | 45.4%                       | 45.8%                       |
| <b>Institutional Measures</b>   |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <b>Expected Learning Outcomes</b>   | (cumulative)                   |                           |                             |                             |
| Undergraduate Degree Programs   | 97.5%                          | 100.0%                    | 100.0%                      | 100.0%                      |
| <b>Faculty Mentoring</b>  |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <i>Participation in Formal Programs</i>   | 17.8%                          | 33.3%                     | 18.0%                       | 18.2%                       |
| <b>Student-to-Faculty Ratio</b>   |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <i>FTES/FTEF(IPEDS Faculty)</i>   | 21.9                           | 23.5                      | 23                          | 23.5                        |
| <b>Transfer Students with Declared Majors</b>   |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| Spring Quarter Percentage for Fall Entrants   | 84.0%                          | 90.0%                     | 86.0%                       | 88.0%                       |
| <b>Minority Graduation Rate</b>   |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <i>Minority Graduates/Fall Minority Enrollment<br/>(Three Year Average)</i>                 | 26.9%                          | 25.0%                     | 25.0%                       | 25.0%                       |
| <b>Internship Participation</b>   |                                |                           |                             |                             |
| <i>Percentage of Students<br/>in Cooperative Education Courses<br/>(Three Year Average)</i> | 7.8%                           | 10.0%                     | 7.8%                        | 7.8%                        |